

***Warrant Article:*** *To see if the Town will vote to authorize the Board of Selectmen to seek grant funding to study the natural resources on Town-owned properties (Tax Map 42, Lots 04, 54, 70, 72 and Map 41, Lot 72) with the potential of placing a conservation easement on a portion of Tax Map 42, Lots 54 and 70 (located behind the Town Offices) and to accept gifts or grants from non-Town sources for this purpose, which conservation easement, if any, would require subsequent Town meeting approval.*

At the March 2010 Town Meeting, the town owned properties in the vicinity of the Town Office will be the subject of a warrant article that could help determine their future. The Article is about whether the area should be surveyed at no cost to the Town. The result of the survey will identify the ecologically sensitive areas that do not lend themselves to development and might be put into a conservation easement. **Note:** When a conservation easement is considered it would have to be approved at a future Town Meeting.

## **Background**

In 1978, the Town of Harpswell acquired 117 acres on Mountain Road (Tax Map 42, Lot 70). This property is the home of the Town Office, Recycling Center, community TV station and the new cell tower. Adjacent to the 117 acres is a 100 foot wide parcel that begins at Long Reach and continues west across the Mountain Road ending at the shore of Strawberry Creek (Tax Map 42, Lots 04 and 72). A 9.7 acre parcel that contains a 200 ft. high viewpoint (Tax Map 41- Lot 77) is nearby.

In 2002, an adjacent 77 acres was purchased to the north (Tax map 42, Lot 54). At the time, a range of possible uses to benefit the community were given for its purchase. Ideas for the use of the land have included affordable housing and municipal buildings, as well as, the installation of wind turbines on its high point and the designation of a part of the land for recreation and conservation.

## **Future Use of Town Land**

When it was purchased, the land was intended for some future public use. However, a good portion of the area could not easily be developed. The terrain is very uneven with several ridges, cliffs, streams and wetlands, making much of the area incompatible with development. The area provides scenic views across Harpswell and provides habitat for our local wildlife. The Town would like to apply for a grant to do a survey of the Town owned properties described above in order to determine the ecologically sensitive areas that do not lend themselves to development and might better be preserved for conservation.



## The Cliff Trail



The Recreation Committee created the Cliff Trail on the original 117 acre Town owned parcel and extended it to include the northerly 77 acre parcel purchased in 2002. The 2.3-mile loop trail begins behind the Town Office on tidal Strawberry Creek. The trail follows the Creek shore north to the “head of tide” and the “cascade” before turning east, crossing streams, several ridges and the historic “Old County Road” as it climbs toward a 150-foot viewpoint. The cliffs overlook Long Reach and provide spectacular views in three directions. The trail takes you

through two ‘fairy-house’ zones where children can build dwellings for wee folk using natural items and crosses near the 200-foot high point in Harpswell before ending near the recycling center. The trail is popular with both residents and visitors to Harpswell. The terrain along the trail is uneven and heavily forested. It provides a habitat for wildlife, as well as a buffer along the Long Reach wetlands.



## Town owned land and the Long Reach Focus Area

At the March 2009 Town Meeting, the townspeople approved an Open Space Plan for Harpswell. The plan established 12 conservation focus areas for potential preservation and protection. The land surrounding Long Reach makes up Focus Area One (1). This area is important because of its variety of natural environments. Included in the area is a state protected salt marsh and a coastal floodplain that are nurseries for shellfish. Its freshwater wetland and three coastal wetlands contribute to the vigor of the clam flats at the mouth of Long Reach. A strong ecosystem will continue to provide a high value wildlife habitat and nesting area for the rare, endangered and/or threatened species that are found in the area.

The majority of the land on the east side of the Reach (and opposite the Town owned land) is protected by the State and the local land trust. Protection of the sensitive portion of the 194 acres of Town land for conservation on the west side is just as important to assure water quality and to preserve the overall health of the Long Reach ecosystem, our largest undeveloped corridor of open space in Harpswell.